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A NARRATIVE

OF THE

RISE AND PROGRESS

OF THE

FREECHURCH, COTE STREET,

MONTREAL,

READ TO THE CONGREGATION AT THEIR ANNUAL MEETING ON THE 25TH APRIL 1855,

By the Pastor,

THE REV. D. FRASER, A.M.

PRINTED BY REQUEST OF THE DEACONS' COURT.

MONTREAL:
PRINTED BY J. C. BECKET, 38, GREAT SAINT JAMES STREET.
1855.

Montreal. Free Church of Scotland.

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A NARRATIVE, &c.

Twelve years have almost elapsed since the disruption of the Church of Scotland. Ten years have passed since this Congregation was organized; ten years of trial, but of great blessing, and well worthy of solemn and thankful remembrance. Those who were intimately connected with the first movements in our congregational history will never, I think, allow themselves to forget the zeal, cordiality, and spiritual warmth of that time. But many of the early company have passed away—we miss "the old familiar faces;" and, though this is the most recently formed congregation of any description in the city, the facts concerning its origin and early career are now known to perhaps not more than one half of our ordinary Sabbath assembly.

My present retrospect is intended to preserve these facts from oblivion where they have once been known, and to communicate them in an authentic form to those who may have received deficient information.

1843.

I go back to 1843, to put it on record, that it was in May of this year, the disruption of the Church of Scotland took place. The evangelical party, now constituting the Free Church of Scotland, renounced their connection with the State, because, they could no longer retain it without forfeiting their spiritual liberties, and without betraying a principle, for which our forefathers firmly con-

tended and even shed their blood—the principle of the sole supremacy of Jesus Christ in his Church, administering its affairs through Church officers, independent of all secular control. The noble conduct of the Free Church created a great sensation through the Christian world, and thrilled the hearts of faithful sons of the Church of Scotland, not merely in Scotland, but on distant shores.

1844.

It was not till the 6th January, 1844, that any sympathetic movement took place in Montreal. A few private friends, connected at the time with various Churches in the city, met on that evening at the house of the late Mr. Orr, then in St. Paul Street. The names of those present on that occasion are as follows :—Rev. William Bethune, (Probationer) Messrs. Redpath, Orr, A. Ferguson, D. Ferguson, Wm. McIntosh, W. Hutchison, James Morrison, E. McIver, Archd. McGoun, Alex. Fraser, and D. Fraser. The meeting resolved itself into a Committee for the furtherance of the cause of the Free Church in this city and in the Province. Dr. Macnider, Messrs. Stevenson, Court, and Mackay were subsequently added to this Committee.

The movement begun by this apparently feeble band soon grew, by God's blessing, to great importance. Correspondence was opened up with friends of the cause in many parts of the country. Three tracts on Free Church principles were widely dispersed in large editions. A requisition was dispatched to the Free Church deputies, then in the United States, urging them to visit and rouse the Presbyterians of Canada. Montreal was foremost in this movement in Canada East, as Cobourg was in Canada West. Dr. Cunningham intended to comply with the requisition, but was unable to do so. Dr. Burns, however, (then of Paisley) visited

the Province with great effect. The interest excited by his sermons and addresses, and the large sums raised in this city, in the spring of 1844, for the building fund of the Free Church of Scotland, were, as may be supposed, great encouragements to the small, and, I may add, hard working Committee.

Other deputies, Messrs. Lewis and Chalmers, followed in the wake of Dr. Burns. The tide of Presbyterian feeling in Canada began to set in strongly in favor of the Free Church movement. In June of the same year, the Canadian Synod broke into two at Kingston, one part adhering to the (remaining or residuary) Established Church of Scotland, the other party renouncing that connection, and organising themselves as the Presbyterian Church of Canada, commonly called the Free Church.

The Free Church Committee in this city, however, did not wait for the action of the Canadian Synod, to decide their position, but, two months before the Synod met, sent to the Colonial Committee of the Free Church of Scotland an earnest application, craving that an able minister should be sent to Montreal, to form a new congregation. Feeling at the same time very anxious for the services of a devoted Evangelist to labor in town or country, the Committee sent an invitation to the Rev. W. C. Burns, (now in China), who accepted it, and passed more than a year in this city and in various parts of the Province, with blessed results, it is believed, in the conversion and quickening of souls.

The cause of the Free Church was greatly promoted in course of this year, by the visit and labors of the Rev. John McNaughton, of Paisley, now of Belfast. He warmly encouraged the proposal to establish a new congregation in this city, and sug-

gested the plan, afterwards carried out, of obtaining a succession of able ministers from Scotland, each for a period of about six months, until the congregation should be in some degree consolidated, and a satisfactory pastoral settlement made. Thus closed 1844.

1845.

Soon after 1845 opened, the plans for a new congregation began to be put in action. The Colonial Committee deputed for this purpose, the Rev. Jno. Bonar, then of Larbert, a minister of experience, who soon proved himself eminently qualified for the duty with which he was entrusted, and who won the confidence and affection of all who approached him. For a short period he officiated in St. Gabriel Street Church, then vacant by the absence of the late Mr. Esson, at Toronto. Meantime he organized Bible classes, which were largely attended, and began to meet with applicants for membership in the proposed new congregation, at a hired room in George's Street, which is still in the recollection of not a few of our original members.

It was in the month of March 1845, that a resolution passed the Committee to erect a temporary wooden Church. In three weeks it was finished, at an outlay of £300, defrayed almost entirely by the still small Committee; and every one who sat in it must recollect how commodious a building it proved, and what happy days were spent by the congregation within their wooden walls. It was opened by Mr. Bonar for the service of God. Many scoffed, but some prayed—and the work soon evinced itself to be of God, and could not come to nought. The whole movement appeared strange to those who had not reflected on the subject, and one may say, and that truly, that it seemed to be a

Church born out of due time, and "a wonder unto many."

Immediately after the opening of the temporary place of worship, four Elders and four Deacons were duly elected and ordained. The Committee, of which I have hitherto spoken, ceased to act so soon as officebearers were regularly appointed.

The wooden Church was attended by a congregation of 400 to 600, under the powerful ministry of Messrs. Bonar, (Larbert), Arnot, (Glasgow), and Somerville, (Glasgow), who were successively sent out by the Colonial Committee. District prayer meetings were formed and well attended. In devotional meetings, several non commissioned officers and privates of H.M 93d Regiment took part, and a large body of that fine Regiment regularly marched to Divine Service in the wooden Church.

The Sabbath School was instituted under the superintendence of Mr. Alexander Fraser, with an excellent staff of Teachers, of whom some have fallen asleep, and some continue until now.

Toward the close of the year, the congregation united in a call to Mr. Bonar, which, however, was declined. It is pleasant to think, that, since that period, Mr. Bonar has occupied a position (as convener of the Colonial Committee) in which he can be of more service to Colonial Presbyterianism, than if stationed here or at any other post abroad.

1846.

This year opened under the ministry of Mr. Stevenson, of Tullibody, whose labors in Christ were blessed to many. It was in April of 1846, that Dr. Macnider, one of the Deacons, much beloved in the congregation, was called to his rest. Mr. Stevenson soon after returned to Scotland, and was succeeded

by Mr. Munro, of Rutherglen, who exercised his ministry with great earnestness and much acceptance.

During this year the present Church was built, an expensive undertaking, beyond the ability of the congregation at the time, and involving a heavy debt, which is not yet entirely liquidated.

After Mr. Munroe returned to Scotland, Mr. Alexander, of Kirkaldy, assumed the charge, and was the last minister of the wooden Church. It was during this time that Mr. Thompson, a very estimable Christian man, who conducted a school in connection with the congregation, and is well remembered by several of us, after a few months' illness died, very much as Dr. Macnider had died in the previous year.

1847.

In the month of May, 1847, the present Church was opened for service by Dr. McGilvray, now of Aberdeen, who officiated in the morning and evening. Dr. Wilkes, of Zion Church, in this city, preached in the afternoon. I may add, that I myself served on that day as a volunteer in the Precentor's Desk.

The deputy sent out for the summer of this year was Mr. Buchanan, of Bothwell, who labored with great ardor. An election of additional Elders and Deacons took place during the summer of this year. In the fall, Mr. Buchanan was succeeded by Mr. Bremner, of Glasgow, whose conscientious diligent discharge of duty is well remembered by many.

1848.

The congregation addressed a unanimous call to the Rev. John McNaughton, of Paisley, but it was declined, and the prospect of a pastoral settlement

seemed as remote as ever. In this year, Mr. Bremner was followed by Mr. Paterson, of Tranent, who ministered with acceptance, and held the congregation together till his departure in the fall. Thereafter came a time of depression and anxiety, as no deputy arrived from Scotland in the winter of 1848 and 1849. It is only just to make mention of the kindness of the Rev. John Black, now at Red River, who then resided here as Secretary to the French Canadian Missionary Society, aud gave good assistance during the vacancy.

1849.

In the spring and summer of 1849, the congregation greatly revived and prospered under the care of Mr. Lewis, of Leith, the tenth deputy of the Colonial Committee. The attendance increased, and all the affairs of the Church began to wear a more hopeful aspect. This was well sustained under the successor of Mr. Lewis, viz.,—Mr. Burns, of Kirkliston, whose ministry was greatly and deservedly prized. During this year there took place an election of additional Deacons.

A call was sent to Mr. Lewis, but after some hesitation on his part, was declined. As it has sometimes been alleged, that this congregation called almost every Deputy in turn, it is well to notice the fact, that three calls, and no more, were sent to Mesrs. Bonar, McNaughton, and Lewis, and the three were declined on the same ground, the prior claims of the spheres of duty in Scotland which these Reverend Gentlemen occupied at the time.

1850.

The ministry of Mr. Burns brings our narrative down to the spring of 1850, when he departed, carrying many regrets. After the declinature of

Mr. Lewis was received, certain overtures were made to Mr. Burns, which, however, had no result.

The Deputy in the summer of 1850 was Mr. Fairbairn, of Allanton, a man of great singleness of purpose. It was in September of this year, that I first ventured to officiate in this pulpit, and a proposal was made to me, to accept a call so soon as my studies at Edinburgh would be completed.

Mr. Fairbairn was succeeded by Mr. Coupar, of Burntisland.

1851.

The ministry of Mr. Coupar carries the narrative into 1851. Under his care, the present financial system was successfully introduced, and the congregation was well sustained in every department. Mr. Coupar returned to Scotland in the spring of the year, the last of *thirteen* valuable men deputed successively to the care of this congregation by the Colonial Committee.

It is fitting here to acknowledge the kindness of Mr. Redpath, one of our Elders, in entertaining nine of these Deputies at his own Residence, free of expense to the congregation, and this in addition to the hospitality shown by him to many other Free Church Ministers deputed to visit the Province at large.

The congregation suffered a loss in the year of which I now speak, in the removal to Canada West of one of the Elders, Mr. Brown, a man very inobtrusive, but of sterling Christian qualities.

On the 20th July, 1851, being then a licentiate, I preached here. The usual forms having been complied with, I was ordained by the Presbytery on the evening of the 8th August, and preached my first sermon as your minister on the 10th August, from 2. Corint, iv. 5. I need not say how trying

was my position, and how arduous the undertaking; but I endeavoured to cast myself on the help of the Chief Shepherd, and on the sympathy and prayers of those that knew the Lord, and I was not permitted to fail or be discouraged.

1852.

Thus we advance into 1852, the congregation evidently improving in numbers and steadiness.

The principal events of the year are these:—Mr. Orr, whose memory will always be fragrant among us, was taken away to be with Christ. A new election of Elders and Deacons took place, by which the official ranks were well reinforced.

The Rev. Hugh Campbell arrived from Scotland, and entered on his duties as assistant.

1853.

In this year there is not much to put on record.—It was a good *pecuniary* year, when a large sum was raised for church purposes, and for the reduction of the debt due on the church property.

Mr. Campbell, having completed a year as assistant, received an appointment from the Presbytery at Cornwall, where he has been ordained and is deservedly valued by his flock.

In the summer of 1853, the Presbyterians of H. M. 26th Regiment commenced attendance in this church, which continued till their removal from the city in 1854.

1854.

1854 was a year of trials. This congregation suffered greatly by the removal of many individuals and families from the city, and also by the terrible visitation of the cholera. Changes, however, do not seem to have weakened it; and the congrega-

tion is more numerous at present than at any former period of its history. To God be all the praise!

In the summer of 1854, the Lord was pleased to deprive us, by death, of a most valuable Elder, Mr. McIver, whose memory we should ever hold precious.

The chief points of encouragement in 1854 are, the institution of a monthly collection for Missionary purposes, which has had thus far a gratifying success, and the organization of a Sabbath afternoon Bible class, which I have myself conducted, and which has been largely attended by the young.

1855.

On 1855 we have entered too recently for me to include any reference to it in this rapid survey of the past.

The history which I have briefly told, seems to me to be one worthy of remembrance, signalizing as it does the faithfulness of God in the upbuilding of a Church amidst many and peculiar trials; a history too, that imposes serious responsibilities on the present office-bearers and members of this congregation, who are bound to give good heed, that the early standard be never lowered, but rather, with God's blessing, continually heightened and advanced.

Let us be humble, for "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble."

Let us be faithful, faithful to our past history, to our present position, to our principles, to our Saviour, to our God.

Let us be of good courage. Fear no opposition from without, or defection from within. "The Lord hath been mindful of us; He will bless us. The Lord shall increase you more and more, you and your children."

APPENDIX:

The following statistics of the Free Church, Coté Street, may be of interest:—

The Number of sittings provided in the Church is	1015.
The number of these actually allocated was, on 20th of April, 1854 .	844.
" " " 1855 .	886.

The estimated attendance ranges from 800 to 1000.

The number of Communicants on the Roll is 336. The additions made from time to time little more than compensate for the frequent losses incurred by removal to Upper Canada and the United States.

The sums raised during the past three years for religious purposes are as follows:—

1852-3—£1304	12	7
1853-4—£1432	19	10
1854-5—£1360	0	8